

Bible Characters – Joseph (Genesis 37 to 50)

The life and events of Joseph are of intense hardship, persecution, pain and suffering. Foremost, this can be seen in his own family, where his brothers commit evil against him, and also outside of his family, where he is falsely accused of a crime, resulting in his imprisonment. Nevertheless, following along the events as they unfold is worthwhile, in that they not only tell us about the personality, character and attitude of Joseph, but also shows us how God remains sovereign in and through all circumstances, accomplishing his goals, regardless of how they appear on the surface.

Having been sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers (Genesis 37), Joseph ends up in prison having been falsely accused (Genesis 39). Yet, God works in and through him, preparing him through these times of hardship and persecution, to enable him and become second in command to the Pharaoh of Egypt (Genesis 41). A severe and far-reaching famine becomes a major turning point in the story.

The famine (Genesis 42) interlinks both the preceding deeds and actions of his original family and Joseph's life in Egypt, coming to a forceful resolution (Genesis 43-50). Here we discover that Joseph is used by God to preserve his father Jacob's family line (Genesis 41-46) and in that way preserving the line of the covenant promise, through Joseph's brother Judah. This is revealed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Matthew 1:2-3). The acknowledgement of God as sovereign in his life is revealed to us in Genesis 45:6-8, where Joseph tells his brothers – and us: "It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt." Joseph shows himself as humble, godly, obedient and faithful servant, who flourishes, where God has planted him.

To conclude, Joseph's life is a good example of a person trusting in God, seeing him through challenging circumstances, such as hardship and persecution. Hereby, God reveals Himself as sovereign ruler over all circumstances, looking after His people, who surrender to Him reverently, repentantly, obediently and wholeheartedly. Through Joseph and his life, God shows His mighty hand, working out His divine plan even in the midst of sin and evil. Joseph reminds us of our Lord Jesus Christ, who went through the ultimate hardship and persecution, culminating in His death on the cross – on our behalf – only to be raised from the dead on the third day, as God's sovereign plan to redeem and save all believers.

For further study:

Gardner P. *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters: The Complete Who's Who in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

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